

Preparing the Council of Young People



LETTER FROM TAIZÉ

N° 2 — June 1970

The Joyful News announced at Easter 1970 :

The Risen Christ comes to quicken a festival in the innermost heart of man. He is preparing a spring time of the Church : a Church devoid of means of power, ready to share with all, a place of visible communion for all humanity. He is going to give us enough imagination and courage to open up a path of reconciliation. He is going to prepare us to give our life so that man be no longer victim of man.

STOP PRESS

4.000 Portugese immigrants meet at Taizé on June 14. The prior of Taizé announces a first concrete gesture for the council of young people in preparation.

The preparation of the council of young people can never be simple reflection, at the same time it engages us in a common action. How to live, from now on, this festival, the sense of which we are exploring for the council, «this festival that the risen Christ comes to quicken in the innermost heart of man»? By living the festival with the poorest, the festival of an action, building with them and so discovering, learning from them their sense of festival.

Together we are going to build houses throughout Europe, with the immigrants who are with us. We shall build with them, not offer something ready-built. And houses amongst our own, to avoid the formation of ghettos. The construction of a house offers a privileged opportunity to meet and to celebrate : building together, immigrants and local people.

Architects have projects ready — a simple, well-built house for a large family on a prepared plot costs 9.500 dollars inclusive (4 rooms, 66.7 m² living space) ; the main construction (masonry and roofing) + sanitary equipment costs 5.500 dollars. In some cases only the materials and certain installations might have to be provided, the rest being the work of unpaid labour.

« What do you propose to young Europeans faced with the poverty there is in the World ? » To this question, which the prior asked him during his visit to Taizé on May 24, Don Helder Camara replied : « The Third World is also amongst you, in the person of those poor in Europe who immigrate to find work, who are more or less well received, who often lodge under miserable conditions. When you, Europeans, speak about developing the Third World, do not forget your own problems of development. Insofar as you do not work for a solution here, you justify the excess of misery in our countries. We can do nothing until you have achieved a balance in Europe ».

Concretely, what does this mean ?

- Establish a team, people of all ages, in order to raise the necessary funds corresponding to the basic construction of a house (5.500 dollars).
- Encourage local initiatives. Taizé will make available a technical service, information, plans, costings etc.
- Since it is impossible to ask something of others without beginning with oneself, a very concrete effort is under way at Taizé — the restoration of old houses, then new buildings. Amongst these last we foresee a small house « Don Helder Camara » which will be built by Portugese immigrants and young people in order that the Portugese of the region may have a part in welcoming those who come.

INTERVIEW WITH BROTHER ROGER

On sunday mornings after the Eucharist, the Brother Prior talks with the people who have attended the service. Since Easter, he has often been asked about the exact meaning of the interior festival which the Joyful News talks about. The following are some notes that were recorded while he was replying to questions.

When you speak about a festival, what kind of festival do you mean ?

In every man there is a portion of solitude that no human intimacy, even that of the most united couple, can fill up : it is there that God awaits us, it is there that he meets us. It is there, in the depths, that the interior festival of the Risen Christ is situated.

At the deepest level of our person there is to be found a kernel, a pivot : the Kingdom with us, the Risen Christ, who gives us a heart that is unified and reconciled.

A man who lives this festival within himself becomes capable of listening with optimism to even the most difficult things in another person and not with the pessimism that, while giving a

certain authority, gives a bad conscience to the other man and stops him in his turn from living the festival.

So the festival is like a field one cultivates within oneself, a field where liberty and spontaneity are given scope. It is true that this field has a limit : the liberty and the creativity of the other. Indeed I cannot do violence to the conscience of the other and make him captive of myself. The festival sings within us from that small point of spontaneity so long as we do not violate the liberty of the other but accept his creativity.

But how can one live a festival when one knows all that prevents the world from being festive, wars, suffering and injustice of every kind ?

I can only give you the beginnings of a reply. What I am giving you is a bit like an interior dialogue so that you can continue it in yourselves.

Knowing about the presents dramas, a new war in Cambodia, the ill-treatment of racial minorities, is unbearable. And for a man advancing in age, these things become perhaps even more unbearable, for the Christian life makes him sensitive, makes him more open to many events. It is unbearable because it is a question of man's distress and man is sacred. Our expectancy cannot continue when it is faced with man who is victim of man.

In order to take part in a greater justice, shall we renounce as far as the interior festival that is

offered to every Christian ? There are those who refuse the festival through an introverted sensitiveness that turns into scrupulousness. They give way to sadness because there is mourning or injustice in their city or their village or elsewhere in the world. All that remains then is to give way under the burden of distress and pessimism. Rather let us prepare a festival for everyone so that as many as possible may take part in it. As Maximinio, the young farmer worker from North East Brasil, told us at Easter, it is then that even the struggle becomes festival.

We shall think over this struggle together. It is to prepare ourselves for this that we are beginning by going down to the source, the Risen Christ, the interior festival that he promotes in man. We shall always come back to this source, as we think about a church that is a place of sharing for all men, that refuses to store up the manna, the reserves. This research will lead us far. It means a struggle, but the combat will be led with respect of persons, for everyone has a right to the festival.

CONTINUING THE REFLEXION ON THE FESTIVAL

Biblical Texts

In community, in Taizé, we too have asked ourselves the question on what the festival in the innermost heart of man means for us. At the heart of our calling are to be found three expressions that resume the spirit of the Beatitudes : joy, simplicity and mercy, that mean the festival that does not come from ourselves. We asked ourselves if this call continued to be dominant within us as we grow older. Are we ready, with a constant capacity to overcome events, to break down the walls that we continually build around ourself ? Are we ready to go forward, to cross thresholds that must be crossed in life, in spite of the interior tyrannies that are present in every man ?

The starting point for our reflexion on these questions was three biblical texts :

« Make me hear rejoicing and gladness » (Psalm 51). If bitterness dominates, if we lose the freshness of the Gospel, how can we rediscover the festival ?

The Risen Christ, the Bridegroom, is present in our innermost heart, thus the festival is always offered to us (Mark 2. 19-20).

The Risen Christ goes with us, as he did with the disciples at Emmaus, even if we do not at first recognise him (Luke 24. 13-35).

Questions that come up...

At Taizé as elsewhere, after two months, many questions have been raised. Here are some of them to examine either on one's own or in groups. There will be many others. For the small groups, one question per meeting is quite enough.

- What does « festival » evoke in me ?
- How can one receive within one this interior festival that « the Risen Christ comes to quicken », in spite of the dullness and the resistance ?
- As we celebrate Christ both dead and risen, can festival and suffering be conciled within us ?
- How to link interior festival and exterior ? There are festivals that can be escapism, i.e. those that are not the bursting forth of an underground current of festival.
- How to search for the festival that exists in the other person, so that one can live this oneself ?
- Interior festival and festival with others : without the interior festival, there is no festival with all the others.
- How to make the Church's life festive, without wounding anyone ?
- How to quicken a festival among men ? How is the festival communicated ?
- What is the relation between the present festivals and the festival to be lived with Christ when we see him face to face ?
- How to go beyond merely making intellectual statements about the festival so that the reality may be perceived in us ?

Three to seven people : cells

What we want to do is rather to call forth life than merely create a new movement : to live together for a time, during the preparation of the Council and during the Council itself. Little provisional groups — numbering three to seven people — make the sharing of experience possible. They are called cells. As every living cell has a kernel, it would be good if each cell had a leader who takes on responsibility for the group and keeps in regular touch with Taizé.

Correspondance

After the Easter Meeting

Among the immediate consequences that the Easter Meeting has had is the large numbers of young people that have been coming to Taizé to talk and to search together. There was a gathering of 800 on the first weekend in may and 600 at Whitsun, in spite of the fact that no particular meeting had been arranged for these dates.

During the improvised meetings that were held, the young people split up into a series of small groups of seven for discussion on the theme : the interior festival. Each group was asked to produce a sentence or a question that would in some way sum up the discussion. Here are one or two examples : « Each person's life is a series of deaths and resurrections ». « We have had the impression of living the Resurrection in the group because in the group we have been really sincere ». « Living the festival is struggling to arrive at love ». « There is resurrection when you want to shout with joy ». « The most important thing for me is the Christ who is alive today. That gives me the strength to continue the struggle ». « It is through suffering that one comes to know the festival ».

Another consequence of Easter is the way in which the numbers of letters arriving in Taizé has risen overnight. This gave rise to the idea of the « *Letter from Taizé* » so that contact can be kept with everyone.

The immediate reactions to the Easter Meeting are very diverse. There are some who express difficulties : « *I left Taizé three days ago and I find it hard to come back down to earth. I lived the Meeting, I took part in it fully, but now I am afraid of losing or deforming the meaning of the Joyful News for I am well aware of how difficult it is to get started again in the business of day to day living.* »

On the other hand, there are those who have rediscovered an enthusiasm in the strict sense of the word (enthusiasm = to be seized by God). « Since I came away on tuesday evening, I feel a tremendous renewal in the whole of my life. I think I have just begun a new life, a life formed and marked by my three days in Taizé. »

Another example : « Must I add that for me the Joyful News gives a unique hope for at the same time it is deeply personal and deeply community centred. You have taught me what the Church is, so how can I doubt that she is on the move ? »

One or two wonder about numbers : « It is the first time I have taken part in a big meeting. It was certainly worth while to hold one for the Joyful News, yet I wonder if for the future if there is not more that is negative than positive in such meetings. People are tempted to stick together in their own groups and this makes it difficult for those who come alone. »

The majority of those who write to us have received the News of Easter with great seriousness and are ready to assume the demands that it makes. « I thought that I was coming to Taizé for the last time, that my place was no longer among you and that there was no ground of agreement, no more work for people of my kind. But I had to come in order to be sure. Several of us came just to see the failure. And now, this Joyful News ! It goes, or can go, very far. It is very demanding. It is not consoling, it is stimulating. One can feel the courage of those who announced it, and it is not the first act that is the most costly but the follow through, the consequences. »

Here are some notes from a group of seven young people who come from three different continents : « We originate from different places but we have decided to think together about the announcement of the Council of Young People. What has struck us most is the confidence and the certainty which is reflected even by the grammatical forms that are used to express the Easter News : The Risen Christ comes to kindle a festival in the innermost heart of man. He is preparing... He is going to give us... He is going to prepare us... It is he who is going to do the work and this means on our part an attitude of expecting, of confidence, of attention toward God and men. Is this attitude other than prayer, reflexion, sharing and com-

munions? The Council of Young People could create an openness of spirit capable of helping us live a festival centred on the Risen Christ who alone is able to make of the present Churches a Christian Church that bears witness by its unity to the love of Christ for mankind ».

Reviving a whole region

Seven young people from the same region came to Taizé at Easter. Despite their previous discouragement and even bitterness, they have managed to reawaken their region. They are not creating a new movement, rather they have brought renewal to what already existed. Their pastor, aged 32, writes :

« A group of two protestants and five catholics went to take part in the Easter Meeting in Taizé. When they left here they were disillusioned and in doubt. They came back transformed in every way. Since then, things have been happening quickly. I myself was discouraged, struggling with parishes that were in many respects dying. They have given courage to me and to the parishioners. Even their bearing in their families, at school, etc., has changed. In a word, their vision of the world, other people, the Church and themselves has been changed from negative into positive, lightened by the joy of the Resurrection. They are certainly living the festival !

» The result : the adults are stupified ! Priests and pastors have been given a "boost" ! I had been on the point of giving in. These young people have brought back hope to us and since they got started I feel as though I were carried by a great wave that is leading us onward.

» The renewal is spreading like wildfire. The Council of Young People has been announced during the masses and the services throughout the region as well as by written statements and the press. The young people have even led the singing in the services. For a parish outing at the beginning of May, they conceived and led the service entirely on their own, and organised a discussion in the afternoon. A week later, a large meeting of young catholics took place. It was decided that this should be an ecumenical day : between two and three hundred young people along with several adults met for a service that

was fairly extraordinary. A jazz orchestra accompanied the hymns and the Council was announced. In april, the bishop of the diocese was to give an address : the young people took advantage of this to speak themselves and to talk about the Council.

» One ought to talk too about the what has been done in greater depth : contacts in the villages and high schools. They have had to meet often, some of them coming as far as 50 km, in order to prepare their services. There are other young people who as yet have only partly caught on, but they follow all the same, borne along by the wave. In a word, the whole thing is really and truly a "revival".

» Projects : Taking part in masses and services for the Whitsun week-end. For this summer, an ecumenical mission, five days in a camping site.

» The group is far from being a ghetto. The young people are looking for contacts with all kinds of people and trying to take part in as many meetings as possible.

» Many young people from the region will go to spend a week or two at Taizé this summer. Our parishes, catholic and protestant, are at one with the young people and with you and are ready to let themselves be interpellated and brought to life. From now on, the young people themselves will keep you informed.»

Commitment

A constant theme running through many of the letters from different countries : what can one do to take part in the « long march » ? How can one commit oneself to it ?

The best replies come from other letters, where young people give their ideas.

« At the request of the chaplain, I went to the prison to talk about the Easter Meeting with prisoners. This turned out to be an unforgettable experience for me as it allowed me to discover a world that I did know at all. I found out that this world was quite close to my own since the majority of the prisoners were between 18 and 25. All this has had such an effect on me because I think that these young men, of whom many are complete failures, are interested and attracted much more than others by the good that is done in the world. »

« The idea of the Council of Young People has touched us very much. We have spoken about it with our friends. Above all we want it to grow and come to fruition within us for it is by this means that we can arrive at a realistic commitment to the hope and the joy of the Risen Christ. »

« We understand the necessity of grouping together for we cannot be reconciled to one another nor live the festival on our own.

» We prayed a lot in Taizé and this was a quite new dimension for us. We feel it is important to invent new ways of living prayer. We might repeat, for example, the experience of a night of prayer here.

» We should also like to go farther in trying to share together, sharing material goods, a deeper sharing of our lives, going farther than mere friendly relations which can often be easy but which do not commit us very much. This demands that each one of us try to let himself be changed by the others.

» We must also overcome our ignorance, we must think about why the churches are separated, try to understand, and to be informed ».

There are other suggestions that have come in which give ideas on how the life of the cells, apart from their reflexion on the Joyful News, might be strengthened. Sharing meals with strangers, students or immigrants (for the immigrants, it is better to be invited to their home than to invite them to come). Giving time to listen to someone whose opinions are quite different to one's own, someone of another generation, someone whose family, denominational or political background is different from one's own, and to try not so much to convince him as to listen to him. In this way, a few young people could think and pray with their parents, their teachers or with church leaders.

Two serious questions

Questions are already being asked along the line of the second stage of the preparation of the Council and to which we shall try to find answers then : how can the Church become more and more a place of sharing, refusing to store up the manna.

The evening before Easter Day, a young man wrote to the Prior of Taizé : « You are encouraging young people to love the Church because you think that should their elan and their searching remain outside the Church, they will suffocate. Finally even I believe that you are right. Yet at the same time it hurts me to see so much ardour and sincere research being canalised to bring back life to a decrepit institution. »

A quite different question : « In the summer of 1967, at an international youth meeting in Taizé, I committed myself to serving the poor : the poor in the industrial society, the sub-proletarian stratum which in France numbers three million people. These are men who for generations have been deprived of culture, are unstable, and are marked by their fate. On the fringe of society, they have no voice, they are a silent minority. I have lived as a presence among them in a suburban squatter area for three years. Recently we attended the announcement of the Council. Now we are trying to follow up the Easter Meeting and prepare the Council perhaps through searching for a means of listening to the sub-proletarian milieux. I am ready to commit myself to this. There is perhaps one thing that will make us different from other groups of young people : here it is a job of galvanising a whole mass of young people, an ideal of justice rather than the Church as the starting point. »

Coming to Taizé

Many people want to know how they can come to Taizé and take part in the reflexion.

For young people, weeks have been organised, starting every monday, from 13 july to 14 september. Please register beforehand.

Other Meetings :

Children : 8 - 9 august ;

Adolescents : 3 - 5 july ;

Married Couples : (In English) august 19 - 24 ;

Two meetings for adults and elderly people :

31 august - 3 september and 15 - 18 october.

There are students that have wondered about contacts with workers for the preparation of the Council. It would

be excellent if each student tried to bring a young worker from his own region with him to Taizé.

Another suggestion that has been made about getting to Taizé : Doing the last part of the journey on foot, from Cluny, Brancion, Chapaize or Tournus, would be an excellent way putting the « long march » into concrete form. One group writes : *« There were eleven of us. Coming twenty five kilometres on foot helped us to get to know one another. When we arrived in Taizé, we already formed a small community, with most of us bound together by a real friendship. »*

Older people have written to us

Right from the announcement of the Council of Young People, it was made clear that there could be no segregation between the generations. Obviously the majority of those who participate will be young, but there will also be adults, old people and even children. No one will be kept out because of age, and no one will have to leave the « long march » because he feels he is no longer « young ». Many people have been struck by this and have written :

« Reading the account of the Council and the desire expressed by the young people of keeping contact with those who are less young has given us a tremendous hope. We certainly feel that barriers between the generations ought to be reduced and that we have much to learn from one another. We are 55. »

« I am getting on — 70 ! I am replying to your announcement of the Council of Young People because I love the Church. Everything in her, around her, and in the world is on the boil. I pray for the Council. The Church of the year 2000 ! I think about this all the time. »

It is important that not only young people should form cells of seven. It would be good if cells of adults and old people were set up too.

A letter from a Moslem from North Africa

« My stay in Taizé completely overwhelmed me and made a new man of me. In the midst of 2,500 young people, I discussed all kinds of things. We talked of the future

of mankind, of peaceful co-existence, of different religions, of what they have in common, of drawing together. There were no more races, languages, nor divisions, but unity. This has produced a tremendous change within me.

» I would so much have liked to speak in Arabic, to express my thoughts on the Risen Christ, because, for me, as a Moslem, Christ is risen too, he will come back to the world at the end of time.

» Now we need a youth that is modern, a youth that will break away from traditions that closed in on themselves, a youth that wills understanding and agreement among everyone.

» Where can we begin? It is through the Church that this task without precedent must be begun. The Church is already a close link between Christians in different countries.

» I promise you that I shall talk at length with Moslems and ask them to come out of closed attitude so that they may be more open and try to understand that Christ is risen for all men.

» I shall begin by speaking with young people so that they may know that at least it is possible to live together with Christians ».

Paul VI Speaks about Taizé

On sunday 19 april, Paul VI spoke about ecumenism to the crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square for the Angelus. Declaring that there were good reasons for hope and that he was maintaining good relations with the Orthodox Churches, he added : « The omens are good, we look toward Taizé with respectful affection. »

The contribution asked for this letter is 7 Fr. a year, to be paid by international money order and addressed to : 71 - Taizé-Community, France, mentioning : « Letter from Taizé ».